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ELECTION 76: THE CATHOLIC VOTE
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///EDITORS NOTE: THIS IS ANOTHER REPORT IN A SPECIAL SERIES ON THE NATIONAL ELECTION. EACH DISCUSSES VOTING BLOCS, ISSUES AND REGIONS FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF A SPECIAL LOCALE OR GROUP.///

ANNCR:

FOR THE FIRST TIME IN SIXTEEN YEARS -- WHEN JOHN F. KENNEDY WAS ELECTED THE UNITED STATES' FIRST CATHOLIC PRESIDENT -- A GREAT DEAL OF PUBLIC ATTENTION IS BEING PAID TO CATHOLIC VOTERS AS A GROUP. VOA'S FRED COOPER IN NEW YORK TAKES A LOOK AT CATHOLIC VOTERS IN AMERICA AND THEIR IMPORTANCE IN THE NOVEMBER SECOND PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION.

VOICE:

IN 1960 IT WAS JOHN F. KENNEDY'S CATHOLICISM THAT FOCUSED ATTENTION ON THE CATHOLIC VOTE. TODAY IT IS JIMMY CARTER'S SOUTHERN BAPTIST BACKGROUND, THE CONTROVERSY OVER ABORTION, AND THE MATHEMATICS OF PRESIDENTIAL POLITICS IN 1976.

THE NUMBERS ARE IMPRESSIVE. CATHOLICS REPRESENT LESS THAN TWENTY-THREE PERCENT OF THE UNITED STATES POPULATION. BUT OF THE TEN MOST POPULOUS STATES, FIVE -- NEW YORK, PENNSYLVANIA, ILLINOIS, NEW JERSEY AND MASSACHUSETTS -- ARE MORE THAN THIRTY PERCENT CATHOLIC. THESE FIVE STATES COULD GIVE A PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE NEARLY HALF THE ELECTORAL VOTES NEEDED TO WIN.

BUT MOST CATHOLICS SAY TOO MUCH IS BEING MADE OF THESE STATISTICS -- THAT CATHOLICS DO NOT VOTE AS A BLOC. IN THE

WORDS OF DOCTOR JOHN DONOVAN -- PROFESSOR OF SOCIOLOGY

AT CATHOLIC-RUN BOSTON COLLEGE:

TAPE: CUT ONE -- DONOVAN

"I DON'T BELIEVE THAT THE CATHOLIC VOTE EXISTS. THAT'S A MYTH THAT MIGHT HAVE HAD SOME KIND OF REALITY BACK IN THE DAYS WHEN THE CATHOLICS WERE AN IMMIGRANT, SOLITARY GROUP, LIVING IN ETHNIC ISLANDS, BUT FOR A LONG PERIOD OF TIME IT'S BEEN DISAPPEARING -- IT DOESN'T EXIST NOW."

VOICE:

TRADITIONALLY,
TRADITIONALLY, CATHOLICS HAVE TENDED TO VOTE FOR DEMOCRATIC PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES. EVEN IN 1972, WHEN MORE CATHOLICS VOTED FOR PRESIDENT NIXON THAN SENATOR MCGOVERN, TEN PERCENT MORE CATHOLICS VOTED DEMOCRATIC THAN THE NATION AS A WHOLE. YET MANY OBSERVERS POINT TO THE FACT THAT A LARGE PROPORTION OF AMERICAN CATHOLICS LIVE IN BIG CITIES AND ARE MEMBERS OF IMMIGRANT ETHNIC GROUPS -- TWO AREAS WHERE DEMOCRATIC PARTY SUPPORT IS STRONG ANYWAY. SOME, LIKE MICHAEL MURPHY, EDITOR OF THE NEW YORK WEEKLY "CATHOLIC NEWS," BELIEVE THE IDEA OF A CATHOLIC VOTING BLOC IS THE PRODUCT OF THE NEWS MEDIA AND NOT ANY CONSCIOUS ACTION BY CATHOLIC VOTERS:

TAPE: CUT TWO -- MURPHY

"I THINK OUR READERS, AND MAYBE NOT JUST READERS OF THE CATHOLIC PRESS, BUT CATHOLICS IN THIS AREA -- WHICH IS THE LARGEST POPULATION OF CATHOLICS IN THE COUNTRY -- SEE THEMSELVES IN TERMS OF THE WAY THE MEDIA THINK THEY SEE THEM. I DON'T THINK THEY ARE ALL CALLING EACH OTHER UP ON THE TELEPHONE AND ASKING, 'HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THIS OR ARE YOU GOING TO VOTE SUCH AND SUCH A WAY BECAUSE YOU ARE A CATHOLIC?' I THINK THE SIGNIFICANCE THERE IS REALLY SUPERFICIAL."

VOICE:

BUT IF THERE IS NO CATHOLIC VOTING BLOC, AS SUCH, THERE ARE ISSUES OF IMPORTANCE TO CATHOLICS. AT THE TOP OF THE LIST IS THE ISSUE OF ABORTION:

TAPE: CUT THREE -- CLARK

"WE SAY IT'S THE RANKING MORAL ISSUE FOR CATHOLICS. THERE ARE MANY OTHER MORAL ISSUES -- EVEN QUESTIONS LIKE EMPLOYMENT AND MANY OTHER SOCIAL ISSUES, MORALLY BINDING ON US FOR FINDING A SOLUTION. BUT IN FACT, IT JUST HAPPENS THAT THE LIFE AND DEATH OF THE INNOCENT UNBORN CHILD DOES OUTRANK EVEN THOSE OTHER IMPORTANT QUESTIONS."

VOICE:

MONSEIGNEUR EUGENE CLARK, HEAD OF COMMUNICATIONS FOR THE ARCHDIOCESE OF NEW YORK:

TAPE: CUT FOUR -- CLARK

"THE CHURCH HAS TRIED TO SAY VERY CAREFULLY -- AND THIS HASN'T ALWAYS APPEARED PROPERLY IN THE MEDIA -- THAT THE CHURCH IS SAYING TO EVERYONE THAT ABORTION HAS BECOME A MORAL ISSUE IN THE PUBLIC FORUM, AND THEREFORE IN POLITICS, SINCE THE SUPREME COURT STRUCK DOWN ALL THE ANTI-ABORTION LEGISLATION IN THE COUNTRY. THE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY DID NOT WANT TO PROJECT IT AS A MORAL ISSUE, BUT WHEN THE SUPREME COURT TOOK THAT STRONG POSITION, WE FEEL OURSELVES MORALLY OBLIGED TO WORK AGAINST IT."

VOICE:

AT PRESENT, ABORTIONS ARE LEGAL IN ALL FIFTY STATES AND JUST HOW THE ABORTION ISSUE WILL TRANSLATE INTO VOTE'S IS UNCERTAIN. BOTH PRESIDENT FORD AND GOVERNOR CARTER SAY THEY OPPOSE ABORTION, BUT PRESIDENT FORD ALSO SUPPORTS AN AMENDMENT TO THE U-S CONSTITUTION WHICH WOULD PERMIT THE INDIVIDUAL STATES TO OUTLAW ABORTIONS. GOVERNOR CARTER OPPOSES ANY CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT.

BOTH CANDIDATES HAVE MET WITH LEADERS OF THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS TO DISCUSS THE ISSUE. AFTER MEETING WITH GOVERNOR CARTER, CONFERENCE PRESIDENT ARCHBISHOP JOSEPH BERNARDIN EXPRESSED DISSATISFACTION WITH THE DEMOCRATIC CANDIDATE'S POSITION. AFTER A SIMILAR SESSION WITH THE PRESIDENT, THE BISHOPS PRONOUNCED THEMSELVES "ENCOURAGED," BUT "NOT TOTALLY SATISFIED" WITH MISTER FORD'S

STAND. HOWEVER, THE CHURCH HAS MADE CLEAR THAT IT ENDORSES NO CANDIDATES -- THAT IT IS SIMPLY ASKING CATHOLICS TO VOTE THEIR CONSCIENCES.

BUT PRESIDENT FORD'S SUPPORTERS SEE THE ABORTION ISSUE AS SWAYING SOME NORMALLY-DEMOCRATIC CATHOLIC VOTERS THEIR WAY. THEY ALSO HOPE TO BENEFIT FROM THE UNEASINESS OF MANY CATHOLICS WITH GOVERNOR CARTER'S CHRISTIAN EVANGELICAL RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND HIS FREQUENT ACKNOWLEGEMENT OF HAVING THE RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE OF BEING "BORN AGAIN." PROFESSOR DONOVAN EXPLAINS THE DISCOMFORT OF SOME CATHOLICS WITH GOVERNOR CARTER:

TAPE: CUT FIVE -- DONOVAN

"RELIGION HAS ALWAYS BEEN, FOR SOME OF THE MIDDLE AGED AND OLDER CATHOLICS A VERY PRIVATE AFFAIR. I THINK THE WHOLE IDEA OF CONFESSION, THE WHOLE IDEA OF A PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN AN INDIVIDUAL AND GOD IN A SILENT CONTEXT, MEDIATED BY A PRIEST (IS IN CONFLICT WITH) THE PENTECOSTALISM OF THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST, EVEN THE PENTECOSTALISM AMONG YOUNGER CATHOLICS. ITS A KIND OF STYLE THAT IS SIMPLY OUT OF JOINT WITH WHAT THEY LEARNED AND WHAT THEY BELIEVE TO BE RELIGION. SO THAT FOR SOME OF THESE MIDDLE AGED AND OLDER CATHOLICS, CARTER'S PUBLIC IDENTIFICATION OF HAVING HAD THIS TYPE OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE, HIS CONTINUING REFERENCE TO HIS OWN RELIGIOUS POSITION AND BELIEFS, THIS I THINK WILL TURN OFF SOME CATHOLICS. I DON'T THINK ITS A QUESTION OF SOUTHERN BAPTIST AS A DENOMINATION OR PROTESTANTISM, I THINK ITS A MATTER OF RELIGIOUS STYLE."

VOICE:

THE DEMOCRATIC CANDIDATE SAYS HE THINKS HIS PROBLEMS WITH CATHOLIC VOTERS HAVE BEEN EXAGGERATED. NEVERTHELESS, HE HAS CONSCIOUSLY ADDED CATHOLICS TO HIS CAMPAIGN STAFF AND HAS MADE NUMEROUS APPEARANCES AT CATHOLIC FUNCTIONS AND IN CATHOLIC COMMUNITIES. BUT THE FORD CAMPAIGN HAS DONE THE SAME -- BECAUSE WINNING A SUBSTANTIAL NUMBER OF THE

POTENTIAL THIRTY-THREE MILLION CATHOLIC VOTES IN AMERICA COULD, IN WHAT IS EXPECTED TO BE A CLOSE RACE, PROVIDE THE MARGIN OF VICTORY.

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